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Hackney, Fiona ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8489-4600>  
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<CH> Beyond Utility. Pushing the Frontiers in Women's Monthlies: *Modern Woman* 1943-1951

<Author> Fiona Hackney

<A> Introduction: active citizenship and feminist consciousness

This chapter examines a 'new consciousness' that emerged, albeit unevenly, in the women's 'service' monthly *Modern Woman* in the 1940s. Published by George Newnes, *Modern Woman* was a mid-range consumer magazine targeted at a readership of professional women and the wives of professionals that first appeared in the mid-1920s. Subject to rationing, magazines reduced in size, yet the women's press took on new importance as a conduit for Government and as a vital support for women dealing with wartime conditions. This chapter argues that the ethos of publications also changed as the home became central to public discourse. The new conditions opened a space to rethink women's social and political participation as 'active citizens' and discursive articles took on a new prominence in the magazine.

Looking back on the woman's magazine industry in the early 1940s James Drawbell, then newly appointed Managing Editor of George Newnes' weekly *Woman's Own*, recalled those years as a unique time when editors could focus on meeting their readers' needs unhampered by commercial considerations.

This was the great time, and it would last only a few years, when magazines would sell solely on their reader-value. It was a journalist's dream. We could plan our magazine as a magazine ... It was the quality of the editorial, in fact, which in those early days caused the magazine revolution to happen ... (Drawbell 1968: 125)

... editors had complete freedom to compile their magazines as they saw fit, reflecting their readers' lives fully and accurately, and balancing 'service' with 'general interest', not fearing to be controversial where they judged this to be appropriate. (White 1970: 132)

For Drawbell this meant magazines transformed by colour in the post-war years, but also the quality of feature articles that debated a raft of pressing social and political issues in which

women, in their expanded role of wartime citizens, had a voice. Women's magazine historian Cynthia White concurs, acknowledging the vital importance of the home-service provided by *Everywoman*, *Good Housekeeping* and *Housewife* in helping the war effort on the home front. Noting the large amounts of 'general interest' material, controversial discussions and informative, thought-provoking articles sparking lively conversation, she argues that in terms of some issues at least, they were 'in advance of the rest of society' as 'the frontiers of modern women's journalism were being pushed right back' (White 1970: 125, 130-1). White lists topics such as equal pay, married women's employment, child poverty, child psychology, housing, state-funded nurseries, parenthood, adoption, divorce, social sciences, starvation in Europe, and women Members of Parliament (MPs), all of which appeared in *Modern Woman* in these years. Laurel Forster (2015: 41), looking at *Housewife* in the 1940s, identified 1943 as the date from which the magazine began to think progressively about an expanded role for women beyond the war. Citing a new 'international element' alongside feature articles by well-known authors such as Monica Dickens and MPs discussing equality, equal pay, and encouraging women to become involved in wider society, Forster argues that a discourse of housewifely competence transitioned into an 'emergent feminist consciousness' in the magazine in these years (Forster 2015: 47).

This chapter takes these observations as a starting point to examine the discourse of 'active citizenship' in *Modern Woman* during wartime and the post-war years, and how it offered readers new forms of agency in public and domestic life. Tensions also emerged. War stimulated diverse elements of feminism including the 'equal rights' tradition and championing women's interests as housewives and mothers. Ambivalence between 'equality' and 'difference' shaped the discourse in *Modern Woman* just as it shaped debates among women's professional and voluntary groups, and women MPs (Oram 1996: 55). Magazines, moreover, performed a 'dual role' as '[h]andmaiden of government and handholders of the

female population' (Ferguson 1983: 19). 'Service' magazines which, pre-war had mediated between women and commerce—selling readers to advertisers but also representing their needs—(Hackney 2018), had to rethink this in terms of their duty to government: recruiting women to industry, providing practical advice about shortages, and boosting morale, while providing a 'voice' for women on the national stage. The chapter concentrates on the years around three 'moments' in the 1940s: 1943, the height of wartime mobilisation; 1946, the start of post-war reconstruction; and briefly 1949, the year when Sybil Chaloner, *Modern Woman's* editor resigned and the ethos of the magazine changed. Focusing on discursive features, understandings of fashion (1943) and the home (1946) are contextualised within wider debates about active citizenship that were taking place in the magazine and elsewhere.

#### <A> The *Modern Woman* Family

... we magazine editors formed an Editor's Group early in the war. Object—to keep in close touch with the Big Boys who were running the war and so be able to let you know what we all had to do. Introduced to the Group and with our names before them, most of the Ministries became positively matey in time, and much good work was done. (*MW* Apr 1946: 21)

Wartime women's magazines underwent a profound transformation. Print rationing (1940) and controls restricting the space devoted to advertising (1942) contributed to the cessation or amalgamation of many titles. *Modern Woman* incorporated its sister paper *Modern Home*, increasing its cover price from 6d to 8d and then to 9d in October 1941 when it moved to a 'pocket-size' format. Depending on imports that were difficult to sustain through the U-boat blockade, stocks to each company were limited. Publishers opted to cut page and edition size so circulations could rise with demand, and this in turn contributed to the increased importance of the women's press as war progressed (Reed: 1997: 210, 229). Copies also were passed between multiple households before 'the tattered remains were bundled off to a Service camp or hospital' (Grieve 1964: 134).

From 1941, after much prompting from the industry, editors met regularly with ministry representatives at the offices of the Periodical Publishers Association and the women's press, alongside the cinema and radio, became a vital channel of communications for Government to issue instructions and broadcast announcements (Ferguson 1983; Andrews 2012). Government-sponsored advertisements from the Ministry of Food or Fuel and Power appeared regularly in *Modern Woman* as 'domesticity became a public issue' (Summerfield 2013/1984: 185). The magazine also ran a regular column 'Will You Lend A Hand?' calling for women's services as Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) mechanics, wireless operators for the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF), and drivers for the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS), for instance, as well as for Make-do and Mend and salvage duties (*MW* Jan 1943: 91). In 1943 the *World's Press News*, noting the 'phenomenal growth' in influence of the women's press, attributed this to 'the advance of woman herself as a political, economic and moral force in the life of the nation' (Ferguson 1983: 20). Editors maintained that magazines were not simply a 'doormat press' (Winship 1996: 127). *Modern Woman's* Sybil Chaloner claimed that they resisted Ministry requests to 'soften the blow' for women asking, where possible, for the truth unvarnished by Home Front propaganda (Apr 1946: 21). Even at their most influential, this dilemma reveals a central tension at the heart of war-time women's magazines as editors struggled to fulfil two potentially contradictory roles as: a conduit for Government at a time of national emergency *and* a mouthpiece for women, representing their concerns on a national stage.

The women's press continued to be a significant force in the years of post-war reconstruction as scarcity and rationing persisted in support of an all-out export drive to get industry back on its feet, and hardship and deprivation increased (Kynaston 2007: 22-59). Some things, however, did return to normal. In December 1946 at the end of a particularly punitive year (Garfield 2004) *Modern Woman* reintroduced coated paper stock, meaning

more colour and visual appeal. A humorous illustration in Chaloner's editorial shows her team literally flying high, distributing copies by aeroplane, helicopter and parachute in a celebratory reworking of wartime propaganda. Employing the metaphor of 'magazine as woman' to bind readers to the reinvigorated but more expensive publication, she declares:

... at last [*Modern Woman*] has shed her drab frock; that horrid dun garment that old Poppa Paper Control has forced her to wear for years. She has put on the white full-skirted new gown she has dreamed of, and it brings out, as good clothes always do, her best qualities-her friendliness, aliveness, good looks, and humour ... She was never an hysterical girl, but she can tell you now there have been times when, in her grey paper frock, she wanted to yell and tear her pages off. All that is over and she's all set for a new life of adventure in the brave new world. (*MW* Dec 1946: 29)

Quota restrictions prevented the free play of market forces, limiting advertising, and paper allocation was fixed in proportion to pre-war circulations, inhibiting growth (White 1970: 124). The magazine's cover price had to rise to one shilling to cover the added costs, and Chaloner had to woo readers with the promise of 'brilliant' new artists and writers: *Modern Woman's* 'new clothes and more exclusive accessories will cost us a lot more' but 'she knows you won't mind paying a little more in future for the fun of taking her out' (*MW* Dec 1946: 29).

While the magazine was depicted as a 'woman' for readers, for the Editor, however, the magazine was her child, and the team that produced it a family (Hackney 2018 : 298). Celebrating the magazine's twenty first anniversary, Chaloner reflected on its original pioneering status, 'covering the main interests of women' when it was launched in the mid-1920s:

I had a clear field. Oh, happy days-and nights! For in those early months I often worked till two in the morning sprucing up this only child ... the women's magazine industry was in its infancy then. Staffs were minute and trained staff few ... Within a few years there were a dozen sixpenny magazines for women. (*MW* July 1946: 21)

As men returned from war, the names of established male illustrators and authors started to appear in the magazine (*MW* Dec 1946: 30-1). The Expert Editors and core editorial staff,

nevertheless, remained staunchly female offering, in Chaloner's words, the 'promise of continued service'. A feature in the anniversary issue pictured the 'specialists': Dr. Elizabeth (Health Club), Elizabeth Troy (Fashion), Jane Howe (Beauty), Hilda M. Whitlow (Housecraft), Noel Ward (Furnishing and Decoration), Edith A. Browne (Cookery), Grace A. Rees (Careers Adviser) and Ray Allister (Personal Problems), and named the editorial team: Sybil Chaloner, Barbara Vise (Assistant Editor), Sheila Webb (Chief Sub-editor), Vivian Belmar (Sub-editor), and Winifred Bottomley (Editorial Secretary) (*MW* July 1946: 71). Along with Chaloner, Vise, Allister, Troy and Howe had been with the magazine since pre-war days. Author, poet and illustrator Stevie Smith was a newer addition. She wrote a monthly book review page for *Modern Woman* from the early 1940s, contributing to its literary status (Spalding 1988: 44–54). Noting that Smith's celebrated *Novel on Yellow Paper* (1936) had satirised women's magazines, Chaloner added that was 'as they then were. They changed' (*MW* Dec 1946: 30). At its core the *Modern Woman* family was distinctly female.

For Chaloner and Vise *Modern Woman* was literally a family affair, both having relatives who contributed to the magazine. Many women had family in the business, and Chaloner was from a prominent family of London publishers and journalists (Hackney 2012, 2018). Lenore Maude Chaloner who wrote articles and books under the pseudonym Len Chaloner and edited many magazines (*Ideal Home*, *Woman's Magazine*, *Decoration*, *Parents*, *Home and Schooling*) was likely a sister. Lenore's husband Ernest J. Chaloner had edited a daily newspaper and contributed a gardening column to *Modern Woman* and other Newnes' publications. Jennetta Vise whose signature appeared regularly on *Modern Woman* artwork, was Barbara's sister and a prolific illustrator who worked all her life on books, comics, and magazines. Their father Reginald Toye Vise was also a journalist. Philip Burton (2019), who had shared an office with Jennetta in Newnes' technical book publishing department, recalled her method: working late into the evening— 'as freelancers typically do'—

in her small study at 75 Carter Lane, near St Pauls, and the sisters' different personalities: 'She had an older sister, Barbara, a successful journalist, gregarious and more extrovert, unlike Jennetta who was a very private but equally-friendly person'. Chaloner, the Vise sisters, and Ray Allister were members of The Women's Press Club of London which, having been founded 'amid the ruins and desolation of the London Blitz' on April 1<sup>st</sup> 1943, provided an important forum for women to meet, exchange views, discuss trends, and share knowledge with colleagues 'from all parts of the world', connecting them to a larger international family of female journalists (Deakin 1984: 7, 80).

Original signed artwork was an important part of *Modern Woman's* visual appeal and Chaloner cultivated a stable of artists whose style, while rarely abstract, was distinctly modern. The early 1940s provided space for women to establish themselves and most of those named and promoted were women, including: Jennetta Vise, Audrey Wynne Hatfield, Pearl Binder, Mariel Deans, and Francis Mortimer who signed her work C-M. Following modern precepts, their work was never solely decorative but served as a means of visual communication. Better binding machines and new ideas from European and American magazines, meant that art directors increasingly looked for opportunities to create two pages as a 'coherent space' (Reed 1997: 206). Illustration was employed as a mode of 'picture reporting', whereby the artist tells a story through images. Binder, an artist and a writer, would sometimes contribute an original article and illustrate it, Wynne Hatfield created embroidered 'art' pieces for readers to copy, while Vise specialised in humorous board games to communicate complex information in an interactive way. Stevie Smith illustrated her Book Review page. Deans, Mortimer and Smith appear in a photo-feature where their continental, American or generally 'bohemian' credentials were emphasised. Deans lived in a 'Mayfair back-alley' and had worked in London, Paris and New York in fashion drawing and journalism before contributing 'lighter love stories and girl-to-girl beauty talks in the



blackout' to the magazine (Dec 1946: 31). Frances Mortimer is described as 'young, gay, an unusual beauty'. The accompanying photograph shows a slim, dark, striking woman posed with cigarette in hand. American born, she ran a design studio in Paris with her husband and worked as free-lance artist in London and New York. Mortimer created the artwork for *Modern Woman's* 'out-of-the-ordinary' covers in the post-war years, which sometimes displaying a Surreal twist, were contemporary, delicate, and daring. Over a period of months towards the end of 1946, for instance, she consciously played with magazine conventions, in particular the visual rhetoric of the 'female gaze'. The women on the covers, sometimes with a hand obscuring part of their face, eye the reader ever more directly, culminating in a final close-up on the cover of the Christmas issue where the eye alone is visible: a 'mind's eye' that seems to challenge the reader to see herself differently (**Figure 22.1**).

<Insert here- Figure 22.1 *Modern Woman* Front Cover, artwork by Francis Mortimer, December 1946>

Chaloner employed a collegial, even feminist, tone with readers addressing them as 'sisters' and the magazine's 'ideal reader' was always represented as active and engaged, whether at home, at work, or in parliament. In her 1946 New Year editorial she imagines her readers:

... sitting behind that desk; beside that mountain of mending; in that store; hurrying through the ward; teaching that out-size class; lecturing; washing-up; travelling uncomfortably; making your maiden speech in the House; taking all those ante-natal patients in your clinic; feeding the hungry ... (Jan 1946: 21)

Written after the 1945 general election that brought a Labour government with twenty-four women M.P.s to power, and hopes were high for women's participation in reconstruction, the editorial positions *Modern Woman* readers as hard-working, professional, capable, civically-

minded active citizens. A trope that emerged from wartime emergency, belief in women's active citizenship was to become a central tenet shaping the post-war magazine.

<A> 'Fiction, Features, Fashion, Knitting, All the Facts on Wartime Living': feminism and fashion agency

Feature articles exploring women's active citizenship, during and after wartime, took on new prominence in *Modern Woman* from 1943, the year in which the Equal Compensation Campaign achieved a landmark victory for female equality (Beaumont 2013: 148). This section explores the tenor of that debate and how arguments about women's rights and duties framed in feature articles filtered into more conventional areas such as the magazine's fashion page, helping to transform ideas about female agency, appearance, and identity. In a *Modern Woman* interview of early 1943 MP Ellen Wilkinson, then Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Home Security, ratified a government order making fire-watching compulsory for women's Civil Defence work at a time when, in her words, 'Total war comes right into the home' (*MW* Jan 1943: 40). Such wartime rhetoric linked women's equal participation with the promise of full citizenship and was used by feminist groups and others to support 'equal rights' arguments—above all for equal pay. Hopes were raised when women's organisations working with the thirteen cross-party female MPs in the National Government succeeded in their campaign for women's equal compensation for war injuries (*MW* Feb 1944: 46–7). War, at the same time, reinforced gender difference, albeit in new ways, as the maintenance of the home front meant that social issues typically gendered as feminine: housing, children's education, family, health rose up the political agenda, fostering a new sense of 'complementary but different' female citizenship. Feminists, as historian Alison Oram points out (1996: 63–5), struggled to reconcile these differing positions by fighting for women's improved political participation and a 'new form of citizenship for the housewife'.

These debates were articulated for *Modern Woman* readers in a series of six discursive articles, billed by the magazine as ‘challenging’, by future Labour MP Elaine Burton (*MW* Nov 1943: 42). Burton was eager to redress the lack of women’s voices in national politics. Described as ‘an ardent but not aggressive feminist’, she combined ‘equal rights’ demands for equal pay with advocacy for women’s active participation in areas of special interest to them; from 1950 she became the ‘housewives’ voice’ in parliament as an authority on consumer protection (Sutherland 2004: 16–17). Burton wrote a weekly column on women’s wartime difficulties for *The Star* in the early 1940s—the articles were published as *What of the Women* (1941) and *And Your Verdict* (1942)—and her *Modern Woman* series, effectively a call to arms for women, provided a touchstone for progressive thinking in the magazine. Written at the height of war-time emergency—her first article was triggered by government’s drive to involve more married women in the war effort (Summerfield 2013/1984)—Burton, like many others, was also looking forward to envisage an active role for women in post-war reconstruction. Her articles focused on salient themes: married women’s right to work outside the home, raising the status of domestic service, improved housing, and the expansion of women’s post-war employment (*MW* June 1943: 46).

Drawing inspiration from the success of the women’s equal compensation bill—sadly to be the ‘only clear feminist victory of the Second World War years’ (Oram 1996: 58)—Burton argued for the power of women’s collective action as ‘good citizenship’: ‘It is our business as women to *get* the things we know are necessary for the welfare of the community’ (*MW* Aug 1943: 46-7). To achieve this, she proposed a network of ‘Group Action Councils’, following the model of Soroptimist ‘Standing Conferences’, which would bring women together to talk, clarify ideas, and work collectively to put them into effect (*MW* Aug 1943: 42–3). These were to be run in collaboration with existing organisations, from the Women’s Voluntary Service (WVS) and the National Council of Women (NCW), to the

Women's Institutes (WI) and the Co-operative Guilds (CG); women in the countryside were also encouraged to set up their own 'village Council' for weekly or monthly meetings (*MW* Nov 1943: 43). All points of view were to be heard, 'pooling brains and goodwill' across party political and class lines, and facilitated by the women's press: 'As a reader of MODERN WOMAN you can join our Council *now* as you read this article!' (*MW* Aug 1943: 47).

Her articles, written in a style somewhere between conversation and adversary, combined provocation with empathy to stir women into action as Burton presented both sides of the argument before pressing her point home. Titled 'Women are lazy thinkers', the first in the series was termed 'an attack that will start the talk going in any group of women'. A question and answer format at the start and finish reproduces the discursive qualities of 'talk':

"Should women take a fuller share in the life of the country?"

"But they do-everywhere in factories, nurseries, homes, the Forces, here and overseas, the women are doing a grand job!"

"Yes, I know, BUT ..." (*MW* June 1943: 46)

"If you do this you will be taking your share."

"In what?"

"In citizenship, of course." (*MW* June 1943: 47)

The pronoun 'we' is used throughout the series to foster a sense of collectivity while enabling Burton to share her own experience of work and unemployment to enhance reader-identification, a tried and tested journalistic strategy (Hackney 2016: 113–14). Humorous line drawings by Audrey Wynne Hatfield lightened the mood.

'An Englishman's Home is his Castle', the second article, was in fact an argument for 'Married Women and outside-the-home careers' (*MW* July 1943: 42–3, 46). '[I]t is not necessarily "old-fashioned" to say that a woman's place is at home, or "modern" to say that she should go out to work', Burton intones adding, but 'why on earth shouldn't a married

woman go out to work?’ (*MW* 1943 July: 42). Points in favour– the wife with no aptitude for housework, the trained woman whose expertise was wasted at home–recall pre-war arguments, but wartime emergency gave them new weight. ‘Are *you* going to forbid her to give that service to the community?’, Burton declared, claiming work made married women ‘better citizens’ and aligning the issue with reforms shaping reconstruction and the Welfare State (Hackney 2016; *MW* July 1943: 42):

Every human being, whether man or woman, has a right and a duty to work; to use his or her brain and hands for self-support and the benefit of the community ... In the future, you and I have to see that adequate wages are paid; that children’s allowances become law, that full medical service is available to all, and that the new houses are planned to save all unnecessary work. (*MW* July: 46)

Housing, domestic work and new areas of employment for women came next. Advocating such progressive ideas as state subsidies for households below a certain income to employ domestic help–‘our plan must be for all, not only those who can afford it’–Burton proposed a ‘domestic workers charter’ devised by a committee of housewives, workers in domestic service agencies, and domestic science teachers to raise the status of domestic work (*MW* Aug: 42–3). And William Beveridge’s term ‘the Giant Squalor’ became a metaphor for the housing problem: the ‘national disgrace’ of homes in cities which evacuation revealed ‘the Giant Squalor in all his strength’ (*MW* Sep: 42–3, 46). Whereas, anxieties about the feminisation of jobs for women had characterised pre-war employment discourse in magazines, the rhetoric now changed (Hackney 2008: 114–20). In anticipation of a newly inclusive post-war society, a declaration of the egalitarian right and national responsibility for men and women, married and single to work, accompanies jobs as interviewers, nursery workers, camp organisers, cooks, restaurant managers, housing managers, and older saleswomen in shoe departments, shoes being particularly scarce (*MW* Oct: 46, 81). The series ends with the headline Elaine Burton ‘sums up the active attitude that alone can give you the right to the proud title of CITIZEN OF GREAT BRITAIN’, foregrounding its central

message of 'Active Citizenship', co-operation, and women's post-war participation (*MW* 1943 Nov: 42).

<Insert Figure -22.2 "Just what I was Wanting" Elizabeth Troy Fashion Editorial in *Modern Woman*

August 1943 pp. 48-9>

Civilian consumption of clothing was rationed from 1941 to 1949. Introduced to establish 'fair shares' across all classes, points were allocated to garments according to yardage and the Board of Trade (BoT) adjusted the number of coupons allocated according to fluctuating materials and labour (Howell 2012: 95-6). The Utility Clothing Scheme was introduced to control prices and ensure availability of good quality new clothing and in May 1942 the 'Couturier Scheme' was launched, whereby leading British designers created models for manufacturers to reproduce. A 'Dress Revolution' with 'Mayfair designs for the masses!' *Modern Woman* (May 1942: 52-3) enthusiastically proclaimed. Coats were a significant purchase out of the annual coupon allocation and advertisements for Utility brands such as Harella and Heatons—the latter promoted through their 'Good Citizen Series'—appeared regularly in the magazine (*MW* Jan 1943: 54, Mar 1943: 20). Fashion editors helped readers manage their ration. Chaloner claimed 'mine was one of the many small voices that urged Sir Stafford [Cripps, Chancellor of the Exchequer] to reduce the coupon value of suits, coats and frocks' (May 1946: 21). Shoes, stockings and underwear were a constant cause for concern and Troy gave detailed up-dates on their quality and availability (*MW* Sep 1943: 50–1). Corsets - 'voted the black sheep of the whole Utility scheme' - were particularly controversial yet she put duty before beauty when she instructed women asking for improved fit and style that corset makers had to focus on '*supplying necessary support for the women who are working to win the war - and this means no frills and prettiness!*' (*MW* May 1943: 51).

By the start of 1943 Troy's fashion page was almost entirely dedicated to helping readers preserve, renovate, and repair clothing. The BoT had launched its central propaganda effort directed at housewives to encourage 'clothing salvage' and help meet shortages: the 'make do and mend' campaign in 1942. Women's magazines were a lynchpin in the scheme. Paper patterns were an established part of the merchandising offer of 'service magazines' and women could save coupons by making rather than buying readymade (Hackney 1999: 76–9). Publishers, additionally, owned their own pattern houses and the *Modern Woman* 'Pattern Service' meant that Troy could swiftly respond to changing wartime conditions of scarcity and coupon reduction. Her editorials reveal a range of strategies. In January, assuring readers that 'Two or three colours in a frock, suit or coat is the new fashion', she provided patterns for 'clever jester clothes' made from 'coupon cheap remnants', an example of the 'mildly eccentric edge' that wartime outfits began to adopt (*MW* Jan 1943: 52-3; Howell 2012: 145). The ingenious 'Master Pattern' (1s 6d) appeared the following month, a 'versatile design' that could not only be adapted to make multiple dresses, but also was a customisable template designed to help readers 'cut fresh garments from old clothes' (*MW* Feb 1943: 48–9). In April, 'Shirt Tails' gave hand-cut patterns for multiple items that could be made from a man's shirt 'past mending' including: slip, cami-knickers, boy's pants and vest set with a yoke to eliminate elastic, and a 'Coif Snood' designed for the magazine by a 'Famous London milliner' (Apr 1943: 54–5, 93).

'Mending – make it an art!', an article written by F. Conyers, coincided with the launch of the BoT's *Make Do and Mend* booklet, the centrepiece of the Campaign (MoI 1943/2007). Handicraft teachers were in short supply and magazines helped address the skills gap in their advertising pages as well as editorial. *Modern Woman* carried monthly BoT adverts urging readers always to be ready to administer "'first aid" treatment' with a needle and cotton and prompting them to join 'Sewing and household jobbery' classes and 'mending

parties' (*MW* Jan 1943: 6, Mar 1943: 4). Cuts in ration levels and the inclusion of household linen in the scheme in autumn 1942 resulted in widespread complaints with towel rationing, "a really heavy blow" (Zweiniger-Bargielowska 2000: 89-90). BoT ads tried to plug the gap by showing housewives how to cut, turn and re sew sheets to extend their life and make towels from bedspreads (*MW* Apr 1943: 2, Jul 1943: 6). Commercial ads employed similar appeals. Lintas, the publicity arm of Lever Brothers which, along with the major women's organisations had advised government on the 'make do and mend' campaign, devised the 'Wartime Clothes Service' sponsored by the 'Lux Washability and Renovation Bureau' to sell Lux soap powder through a seemingly endless roster of transformational tips: 'A Practical Playsuit from Parental Pyjamas!' (*MW* Jan 1943: 2), 'Off-Duty Dressing-Gown' from discarded frock' (*MW* Mar 1943: 2), 'FROM cast-off pyjamas TO couponless blouse' (*MW* July 1943: 2).

Even at the height of war women wanted to feel feminine (Kirkham 1999: 143) and with their lively colour illustrations Troy's fashion editorials combined feminine pleasure with wardrobe patriotism. Editors fostered 'new fashion narratives' and a 'whole new approach to the buying and wearing of clothes' (Howell 2012: 98, 117). While Utility styles favoured a streamlining of design, Troy's editorial strove to conjure up a sense of joyful fashionability for 'war-strained wardrobes' while keeping shabbiness at bay (*MW* May 1943: 48, Sep 1943: 53-4). Articles such as "Just what I was Wanting", for instance, responded to conditions of scarcity and women's desire for a contemporary, fashionable yet feminine silhouette. Published in August 1943 when, as Troy put it, 'Clothes coupons are at their lowest ebb - if not non-existent! Shop windows simply a tantalizing range of forbidden fruit', the striking image of a dark-haired woman dressed in a red and yellow pyjama suit brings a sense of Hollywood glamour to remnant-made items as 'ingenuity was given its own drama' (**Figure 22.2**) (*MW* Aug: 48-9, Howell 2012: 147). The take-up of trousers was more



prevalent among younger, London-based and, above all, ‘better-off’ women (Howell 2012: 119–20). Suggesting the wider age-range and distribution of *Modern Woman* readers, trousers rarely appear apart from an occasional article on etiquette, which advised consistency in the form of a ‘masculine topcoat’ and shoes to go with ‘he-man’ corduroy ‘slacks’ (*MW* June 1943: 42).

Opinions differ as to the success of ‘make do and mend’. Historian Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (2012: 120–1), considering much of the advice ‘bizarre and impracticable’, argues that response was ‘predominantly negative’. She draws on interviews with working-class women from a 1942 government report which attributed: lack of time, the fact that “‘mending and making do is nothing new’”, and difficulties accessing women’s magazines for the lack of interest. Women also complained that patterns weren’t provided for remaking clothes, something that may have contributed to Troy’s pattern strategy. Compiled five months after the Make-do and Mend Campaign launch and before publication of their booklet, the report could not represent the full range of women’s interest. The numbers attending the 12,000 Make-do and Mend and dressmaking classes that the BoT was running in their evening and technical schools by 1943–women’s voluntary groups offered a similar quantity–suggest greater enthusiasm, even if for many this was mainly a means to access society ‘beyond the house’ (Reynolds 1999: 331). Author and journalist Molly Panter-Downs’ (1941/1999: 77–94) gently humorous short story ‘Literary Scandal at the Sewing Party’ shows how, united in a shared purpose, women met across the social classes. Burton’s ideal of active citizenship was fuelled as much in craft groups as it was in political groups, as knitting and sewing skills took on new status. Mass Observation diarist Nella Last, for example, was celebrated as ‘the Salvage Queen’ (Broad & Fleming 1981/2006: 80). The new fashion skills and narratives combined an ‘evolving sense of aesthetic freedom’ for women with a culture of ‘patriotic thrift’ that caught the public’s imagination, and women’s

magazines played an important part in this (Howell 2012: 147, 98). The high public profile of Make-do-and Mend helped consolidate a view of women 'as capable, imaginative and lateral thinking' (Howell 2012: 185). Together with the calls from MPs, such as Burton and women's organisations for women's participation as active citizens, this signalled a new consciousness of female agency that was manifest equally as powerfully in fashion editorials as it was in the discursive articles in magazines.

#### <A> Reconstruction by Design: 'a Pocketbookful of Stimulating ideas'

'Is-you-is-or-is-you-ain't my peace-time baby?'. Sybil Chaloner's editorial welcomed peace with a jaunty Americanism and a drawing of a fairground carousel bedecked with streamers—a 'burst of hope' by—Jennetta Vise who, Chaloner joyfully observed, 'put so much zing into the flags they almost ripped off the flagpoles' (*MW* June 1945: 21). The years of post-war reconstruction, however, would prove challenging. A policy of austerity was imposed to overcome the serious deficit in the balance of payments and rationing continued for another eight years, becoming even more stringent. Magazine editors continued to be in close contact with government, helping to keep spirits up as shortages continued, and prices and queues increased (*MW* Feb 1947: 37–8). 'Whatever we may feel about this Spring, sisters, it is surely a far better one than the Seven Sad Springs that went before', Chaloner intoned, urging readers to look to the future and start planning (Apr 1946: 21). 'Reconstruction' and 'Planning', which had been 'ideological imperatives of the wartime total society', from July 5<sup>th</sup> became central to the new Labour Government's vision of a post-war society (Mellor 1974: 37). Chaloner, nevertheless, could also be ambivalent, suggesting some impatience with the ongoing job of assisting Government:

... the word *planning* is one to make any editor to-day feel weak at the knees. The more so if she has just returned from a two-hour session with one of our Ministries where she has had to swallow a large quantity of statistics and sympathise with the Minister's latest headache: shortage of men, women and babies, skirts, shoes, homes, midwives and shorthand typists. (*MW* May 1946: 21)

Questions about how women could best contribute to the reconstruction of society and, in turn, how society might serve them underpinned debates in *Modern Woman's* feature articles, but in ways that Burton's wartime articles did not entirely anticipate.

Fashion continued to be popular, particularly with the introduction of colour printing, which was ideally suited to showcasing the flamboyantly feminine New Look (1947), for instance, but it was the expansion of interest in all things home-based: housing, house-keeping, architecture, interior design, home-making, home-crafts and decoration that took precedence, followed by articles about women's employment. The magazine's June 1945 issue, for instance, included a feature on the Victory Bride furnishing her home, *and* one on the women's employment in aviation (*MW* June 1945: 54–5, 44–5). The magazine's newly appointed Careers Advisor, G. A. Rees, penned a column helping readers translate wartime skills and experience into 'careers', or at least some form of remunerative employment. Chaloner, like many in government and industry, put her faith in design: 'War has stimulated all "designing" minds. We have seen the last of old-dull-stodge and frightful trimmings in clothes and furniture' (*MW* Jun 1946: 21). Renewed post-war interest in culture was reflected in features on modern art, craft and theatre (*MW* Jan 1946: 40–4, Oct 1946: 28–31, Mar 1949: 68–71). Design came to symbolise the brave new world of reconstruction and 'Britain Can Make It', an exhibition showcasing the latest industrial design, opened in London in September 1946 to great public acclaim (Bilbey 2019). 'Design for Living', two articles by the designer and writer Marian Speyer, employed a distinctly modernist design aesthetic (**Figure 22.3**) to examine the potential of architecture, decoration, engineering and housing management—an area that Burton had anticipated—as careers for women (*MW* Nov 1945: 55–6, Dec 66–8). Arguing that 'Manufacturers are realising just how important good design is in raising exports' (*MW* Nov 1945: 55), Speyer gave full details of training, identifying those

areas most open to women: interior design and decoration rather than engineering, for instance.

<Insert Figure 22.3 'Design for Living'. Marian Speyer. Pp. 66-67 *Modern Woman*  
December 1945 pp. 66-7>

Chaloner, meanwhile, was deliberating the 'trials of the ex-service girl' facing a 'brave new Labour-saving world' (*MW* Oct 1945: 21). The majority perceived employment, especially in low-paid manual jobs, as a temporary war-time necessity. Domesticity was the predominant female aspiration in the early post-war years, which witnessed a decline in female employment, an increase in marriage, and a baby boom (Summerfield 2013/1984: 187–90). As one WAAF told a woman's magazine, she aspired to being 'a good cook and housewife, one who makes a house a *home*' (Waller and Vaughan-Rees 1987: 124). Hers, nevertheless, was a new model of housewifery that unlike her pre-war predecessor took companionate marriage, labour-saving devices, and a part-time clerical job to fit around childcare and domestic responsibilities, for granted (Hackney 2018). Overall, these views were prevalent among younger as yet unmarried women. Many older married women, as historian Caitriona Beaumont (2013: 176) notes, hoped to continue working once war ended, their experience of war work having 'given them confidence in their abilities as paid employees'. Rees's employment columns catered for both constituencies with suggestions for those caring for 'elderly relatives' 'invalid husbands or young children' who wished to work from home and others over thirty looking to start new careers, including (*MW* Feb 1947: 60–1; Jan 1946: 79). Scholars now acknowledge that 'employment did not necessarily result in female liberation or greater equality, and full-time housewifery was a locus of female power both within the family and in wider society' (Zweininger-Bargielowska 2000: 106, Giles

2004). Yet, as Zweininger-Bargielowska (2000: 105) points out, post-war official policy towards women was contradictory, 'combining pro-natalism and the desire to rebuild the family along traditional lines with female recruitment drives'. In a post-war world, magazine editors were increasingly caught between communicating the Government line, no matter how inconsistent, and responding to readers' problems and aspirations.

Debates about women's changing domestic and working lives were inevitably bound up with anxieties about the birth rate, which had been in decline since the 1930s. 'Watch Sweden!', an article by Len Chaloner advocates the Swedish model of state intervention (rent rebates, maternity allowances, job security, and nursery provision) to encourage working mothers to have children (*MW* Jan 1946: 46–7, 66–7). Reporting on a talk given at the Royal Commission on Population by Fru Alva Myrdal, a Swedish authority on population problems, Chaloner points to the wider social and economic benefits of recognising women's 'right to work *and* be wives and mothers'. 'Real progress' she argues could only come from realizing the mutual interests of 'home-makers' and 'career women' and introducing legislation that valued 'women *as* women for the contribution they make to the community'. This vision, nevertheless, could not be realised without domestic support and Chaloner cites a Swedish campaign to establish 'Home Helps' and the Home Research Institute in Stockholm which, funded by government and run by housewives, explored the home as 'a centre of economic consumption and as a place of work'. The view that women had the right to marriage, motherhood and career seems radical for its time and to a large extent it was. Yet, as Beaumont (2013: 178) points out, in the 1940s highly respected women's organisations such as the National Council of Women (NCW) and the Mother's Union (MU) were 'foreseeing a future where mothers would take up employment and successfully combine paid work and motherhood'. Photographs of high-rise 'Dream towers' and 'idyllic' factory, tenement housing set in 'fresh-air' surroundings visualised the benefits of a system where, in

Chaloner's words, 'the family makes the state' an argument developed by Jean Bird in an article in the same issue that reported on slum clearance plans and the massive task of house building needed to give every family in Britain a 'dwelling of its own' (*MW* Jan 1946: 64–5).

The furniture Utility scheme which launched in 1943 offered new furnishings by permit only for those in need, chiefly newly-weds and bombees. Noel Ward, the Furnishing and Decoration Editor, ran an early article on 'Utility Furniture for Wartime Brides' but restrictions meant that wartime articles were chiefly concerned with tips for economy, saving and making do with less (*MW* Dec 1942: 60–1). By 1946 the magazine's home section increased in size despite the desperate lack of available goods and furnishings. *Modern Woman* had a stand at the Ideal Homes Exhibition (1947) designed by Royal Designer for Industry James Gardener; Gardner along with Enid Marx, Gordon Russell and other proponents of 'good design' often featured in the magazine (*MW* Mar 1948: 117, Feb 1949: 72–5). Articles were full of longing for that 'new home' and plans for how to manage and furnish it. Ward made much of colour, providing newly married ex-WAAFs with ideas for light schemes 'after years of austerity' (*MW* May 1946: 64). Colour was important, symbolically and psychologically, for homes suffering 'colour starvation' and as a 'sign of freedom and fulfilment' for a nation escaping 'drabness' and 'mental or physical poverty'. We are returning 'pigment by pigment, shade by shade, to our lives', colour-adviser Doris Langley Moore declared (*MW* Dec 1946: 28–9, 31). Plastics, as non-coupons materials, were attainable (*MW* June 1946: 60–1) while the Swedish home provided a future vision of 'comfort, colour, space-saving and cheerfulness' that could 'be applied to *our* homes—in time'. Ward showed photographs of modern Scandinavian interiors with fabrics based on homecraft methods and architect-designed 'blond' wood furniture which was 'mass-produced for flat package deliveries' and home assembly; a futuristic idea indeed (*MW* Feb 1947: 56–7).

Wartime publicity techniques that had been used to communicate information about saving and economy were now employed to foster consumer aspirations and educate readers about peacetime spending. A colourful two-page, cut-out boardgame designed by Jennetta Vise—something between snakes and ladders and Monopoly—had players move from a dark tenement to their ‘dream home’, collecting information about a bewildering array of ‘labour-saving’ equipment along the way (*MW* Apr 1946: 68–9, 70). Dream ‘labour savers’ included an automatic washing machine, gas refrigerator, central heating, air-conditioning, even an automatic dust collector installed all over the house, something that had featured pre-war at the Ideal Homes exhibition, an event that reopened the following year with a *Modern Woman* stand designed by James Gardener. This dream of future living, however, had its downside for the housewife whose responsibility it was to create a ‘home’ to the highest standards and, for the most part, manage it alone. A series of articles ‘for inexperienced home-makers—married or single’ by Hilda M. Whitlow, *Modern Woman’s* Housecraft Editor, set out the terms. Women were encouraged to build on their wartime experience but warned that, above all, the housework—which was extensive—must be done ‘unobtrusively’ by a homemaker who was not only ‘well groomed’ but also found time to keep up her interests in the ‘outside world’, insuring she would never become boring. Men did have a part to play, but one that seemed to add insult to injury; ‘It is wise to let the men take a share in housework’, Whitlow intoned, ‘but as a pleasure, not a duty’ (*MW* Jan 1946: 62–3). Advertisers, meanwhile, opportunistically used women’s war-time expertise to transition them back into the home. An ad for Main gas cookers pictures a woman welder next to copy declaring, ‘She’s been using the finest equipment in war—she’ll want the best equipment in peace’ (*MW* Feb 1946: 2).

Features, however, countered this consumer-orientated domestic rhetoric with information about women’s engagement in public life. The 1945 election returned twenty-four women MPs. and *Modern Woman* celebrated with a double page photo-feature

introducing them to readers (*MW* Oct 1945: 46–7). In early 1946 Elaine Burton returned to the magazine with a three-part series about women and politics. She contributed the first article about the situation in Britain, Labour MP Barbara Ayrton-Gould examined women in politics in France, and Christin Sandler in America (*MW* Feb 1946: 50–1, Mar 1946: 46–7, Apr 1946: 50–1, 52). ‘Our 24: biographical jottings on the two dozen women in Westminster’ hailed a new age of women’s interest and involvement in politics. Claiming to base this on the large numbers of women she saw attending political meetings not only to ask about housing, social services, and education but also, ‘to see that something was done’, the article was a post-war post-script to her 1943 series. Burton endorsed the ‘different viewpoints’ that women bring, reminding readers that much was still to be achieved, foremost the fight for equal pay. The article outlined women MP’s expertise in education, training, juvenile delinquency, international affairs, and housing so that readers could better envisage their future contribution to post-war society. Ending on a rousing: ‘this is a group of 24 who might be you or me ... they are typical of us modern women and we wish them success in their big job’, Burton’s hopes were not entirely fulfilled.

Historian Helen Jones (2000: 217–20) while confirming that women ‘joined political parties with alacrity and groups such as the WI and TG in their droves’, has argued that it was, however, in the ‘symbolic meanings of active citizenship’ rather than in policy making that they ‘left their mark on the period’. Barbara Vise, in an article that expands Burton’s ideas about constructive talk, develops similar ideas about the symbolism and active citizenship when, declaring the post-war years ‘the talking age’, she examines the wider significance of discussion forums from ‘brains trusts’–‘a speaking part of our national life’–to the United Nations (1945). Ending with a story that could serve as a metaphor for the magazine itself, Vise describes a London Community Centre group as ‘a “window onto the world”’ that helps members ‘share thought in talk’ (*MW* Nov 1946: 22–3, 87; Hackney



2012). Utility furniture was popular in the period for its design, quality, and fitness for purpose (Zweiniger-Bargielowska 2000: 95). Concomitant with interest in women's increased participation in public life, representations of the home as a modern, functional, easy-to-care for space in *Modern Woman* suggested somewhere where the symbolic meanings of active citizenship, while not so evident in policy changes, were materialised in everyday life.

#### <A> Conclusion: The Magazine that Keeps Your Spirits Up and Your Weight Down

The paper shortage was easing by 1947 and restrictions finally ended 1 March 1950 when *Modern Woman* returned to its pre-war size and format but without one key element: its long-time editor. Hidden away, among items on diets and corsets in at the back of the magazine's 'Notes and Letters' page the previous year, is Chaloner's magnanimous farewell to readers: 'Yes, sisters, I have resigned; and it hurts me much more than it will hurt you.'

Well, let's get this business over! ... I can honestly say that if the people of this island are as friendly, amusing, reasonable, generous with kind words as the many thousands who have written to us all in MODERN WOMAN'S offices through the years, then Great Britain, in spite of its dollar gaps and bomb gaps, is still a country fit to lead the world! Good-bye. SYBIL CHALONER. (*MW* May 1949: 118, 120)

C-M's cover depicting a woman's steady gaze as she seriously contemplates herself in a compact mirror, conveys a mood of editorial subjectivity, while the dark-toned still life: green purse, pink rose, and acid yellow gloves, of her Surrealistic final cover the following month—she left with Chaloner—serves as a memorial device. 'Change,' Chaloner declared, 'is the essence of good magazine-making: something to highlight a new idea or give a fresh aspect to an old one, should be in every issue'. Her departure not only signalled significant change in *Modern Woman's* ethos, content, and appearance, but also coincided with wider changes in the women's press. Colour photography, which would increasingly 'rule the roost' in magazine publishing, replaced C-M's covers. The new editor Kay Smallshaw (2005/1949) came from *Good Housekeeping*—the most comprehensive purveyor of reliable housekeeping

advice—and articles addressing the challenges of running a home alone replaced those challenging women to participate in politics. This was in tune with the nation's post-war fascination with the home, spurred on by the Festival of Britain where *Modern Woman* had a stand (*MW* Feb 1951: 18–19). Iris Ashely and *Woman's Hour* broadcaster Olive Shapley were part of new group of media-friendly journalists who wrote for the magazine as it reached out to wider readerships.

David Reed (1997: 203–6), in his history of popular illustrated magazines, takes issue with Drawbell's argument about the selling power of 'quality' features, pointing out that *Woman's Own* and *Woman* more than doubled their circulations during the last years of the 1940s irrespective of their approach. Pointing out that whereas Drawbell enthusiastically employed American writers and illustrators he met through the Goulds—editors of the phenomenally successful *Ladies' Home Journal*—he did not adopt the Goulds' tradition of 'civic responsibility'. 'Choices were made for which the staff were responsible', Reed darkly observes, resulting in the 'cult of femininity' that dominated British women's magazines for much of the Twentieth Century (Ferguson 1983). Arguably, however, editors were responding to readers' changing interests and needs. The surge in readership for mass-weeklies between 1947 and 1950 correlates with the growth in surplus disposable income for the mass of lower paid workers while the 'administrative class', who made up the majority monthlies' readership, did less well (Reed 1997: 209–10). Specificities of social class, culture, and location also made it difficult for a middle-class, London-based, feminist such as Chaloner to understand wider popular taste. Nowhere was this more evident than in fashion. Dislike of clothes rationing and the exigencies of 'make do and mend' underpinned the widespread embrace of ready-made versions of Dior's New Look, particularly by working-class women (Partington 1995). Chaloner, in contrast, saw 'self-expression' as the antithesis of mass-production, declaring, 'British women have never tolerated mass-produced fashion

and I hope they never will' (MW Oct 1946: 21). Her view that '[d]ress coupons have made us look twice and think three times before buying anything to wear ... this is far better for general good looks than having too many and unsuitable clothes, as many of us did before 1941', moreover, speaks more to current concerns about fashion and ecology than women facing their fifth year of rationing (MW July 1946: 21).<sup>1</sup> The discourse of 'active citizenship' so prevalent in the 1940s was absorbed by the burgeoning culture of consumption in the 1950s and *Modern Woman*, *Housewife* and *Everywoman*, all of which embraced challenged and controversial features in the 1940s, closed in the mid-1960s under pressure from television and newspaper colour supplements (Cox and Mowatt 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> *Footnote*. As part of a research project examining how community groups using make-do and mend, upcycling, and repurposing might instil more environmentally friendly clothing behaviour, Claire Dolman developed her own rationing system based on the BoT coupon points system for 1942 to limit her consumption. See S4S: Designing a Sensibility for Sustainable Clothing: <https://s4sproject-exeter.uk> and S4S Project youtube.com.

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